



NEWS

about
Connecticut
Women

Permanent Commission on the Status of Women

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Expecting Better:

Connecticut Earns Grade of "B" in National Mother's Day Report On Parental Leave Policies for Workers

Hartford – While our nation has failed to adopt adequate policies to support families experiencing pregnancy and childbirth, Connecticut has made more progress than most. Parental leave policies in the U.S. are among the worst in the world, and not a single state is doing all it should to guarantee paid maternal and paternal leave to workers. But Connecticut is among the best states, receiving a grade of "B" and tying for fifth place with New Jersey and Washington, according to a new report that provides the most comprehensive analysis of laws and regulations governing paid parental leave in the United States yet produced.

Expecting Better: A State-by-State Analysis of Parental Leave Policies, from the National Partnership for Women & Families was released in time for Mother's Day this Sunday. "The birth of a child ought to be a glorious event, rather than the beginning of

a family's financial ruin," said National Partnership President Debra L. Ness. "Most Americans have no paid leave for prenatal care, no paid leave when a baby is born, and no paid leave to bond with and care for a precious new life. The consequences, for children and parents, can be grim. It is shameful that all states are not doing more to help working families."

"In Connecticut, we have taken important steps, but we are not there yet," said Leslie Gabel-Brett, Executive Director of the Permanent Commission on the Status of Women. "Most recently, our state enacted a law allowing workers of large companies in the private sector to have 'flexible sick leave' – to use some sick days for the illness of a child or family member. This year, the legislature might act to extend that rule to public employees."

"But some workers still have no sick days at all," she continued. "And we don't have a comprehensive family leave insurance system. For Mother's Day, we need more than hearts and flowers-and for Father's Day, too. We need policies to balance the needs of working parents."

Rep. Chris Donovan, Majority Leader of the Connecticut House of Representatives, has been a leader on proposals to help workers balance work and family responsibilities.

"We can see from the experience of California that a paid family leave insurance program can work for employees and employers," Rep. Donovan said. "I'm happy we have a passing grade in Connecticut. But, as I say to my children, we can do better."

Expecting Better reports that, in 78 percent of today's families, both parents work for pay. Women are working longer hours with fewer benefits, and working later into their pregnancies. Women are also returning to work after childbirth at a faster rate than in previous decades, with many mothers returning to the job by the third month after a child's birth. It is no wonder; a survey of personnel managers conducted in 2000 found

that just 12 percent of companies offered paid maternity leave and just seven percent offered paid paternity leave.

For parents, time at home after birth or adoption is critical, and can provide long-term benefits that improve a child's brain development, social development and overall well-being. Parental leave results in better prenatal and postnatal care and more intense parental bonding, and improves the chance that a child will be immunized. But paid parental leave is unavailable to most Americans, and the problem is particularly acute for low-income families, who rarely have savings to sustain them during leave. Roughly two in five working parents with incomes below 200 percent of the federal poverty level have no paid leave of any kind – no paid sick days, vacation days or personal days to use to care for a baby.

Expecting Better finds that all states are coming up short. No state is giving all new parents both guaranteed job protection and benefits. For this reason, not a single state earned a grade of "A." California receives a grade of "A-," and Hawaii, the District of Columbia and Oregon receive grades of "B+." Connecticut, New Jersey and Washington receive a grade of "B."

"Numerous programs and policies make it possible for new parents to provide and care for their babies," Ness added. "California's paid family leave program is a fine example. But few states have such programs, and federal lawmakers haven't acted in more than a decade. As a result, families today are being forced to cobble together solutions, often with dire consequences. Our policies lag far behind our family-friendly rhetoric. We can, and must, do better."

The National Partnership for Women & Families is a non-profit, non-partisan advocacy group dedicated to promoting fairness in the workplace, access to quality health care and policies that help Americans balance the demands of work and family. A National Partnership staff attorney wrote the federal FMLA, and the organization led the decade-long fight to pass it. The FMLA

was enacted twelve years ago over protests from businesses. More than 50 million Americans have benefited to date. Expecting Better is available at www.nationalpartnership.org.

The Permanent Commission on the Status of Women was established by the CT General Assembly in 1973. The Commission studies all matters concerning women, informs leaders about the nature and scope of discrimination, serves as a liaison between government and private interest groups concerned with services for women, promotes consideration of women for governmental positions and works with state agencies to assess programs and practices as they affect women.

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**Note: The report is available as a link on the PCSW webpage at
www.cga.ct.gov/pcsw**